

Rutland Herald

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.rutlandherald.com

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Aug 30, 2009

Springfield wood-chip plant plans put on back burner

By [Susan Smallheer](#) Staff Writer

SPRINGFIELD – A plan to build a \$150 million, 25-megawatt wood-chip-fired power plant in the North Springfield industrial park has been put on the back burner.

Bob Flint, executive director of the Springfield Regional Development Corp., said Friday that the project by Winstanley Enterprises of Concord, Mass., had not been abandoned, only slowed down.

Flint said part of the problem is that Winstanley has been unable to reach an agreement to sell power to Central Vermont Public Service Corp., the state's largest utility, which serves the Springfield area.

The project, called the North Springfield Sustainable Energy Project, was unveiled in February with great fanfare. It was expected not only to employ people but to create renewable energy based on local resources, with minimal environmental impact.

Winstanley executives, including President Adam Winstanley and Ken Grant, vice president of assets, didn't return telephone messages Friday.

Winstanley Enterprises has a proven track record in Springfield and Brattleboro. It bought the run-down Fellows Corp. headquarters in North Springfield three years ago and plowed millions of dollars into its modernization. Today the building is fully rented to three businesses, which employ 350 people. In Brattleboro, Winstanley bought the former headquarters of Northeast Cooperatives, a food warehouse facility that was nearly new, and converted it to office space.

The wood chip plant was to have been built next to the former Fellows Corp. headquarters and would have provided steam heat to that complex, as well as producing electricity. Part of the attraction was that the Fellows facility already had an electric substation because the plant, which once employed 1,300 people, was a big consumer of electricity.

The Winstanley project was one of about 100 projects submitted earlier this year to the state's utilities as part of the effort to diversify Vermont's energy portfolio, which is heavily dependent on the Vermont Yankee nuclear power reactor in Vernon and contracts with Hydro-Quebec, the Canadian power company.

The utilities' contract with Entergy Nuclear expires in 2012, and the various Hydro-Quebec contracts all expire by 2015. Negotiations are under way with both those power companies, but so far no deal has been announced.

The state's utilities were seeking projects totaling 100 megawatts.

The Winstanley plant would have produced enough electricity for 25,000 homes and employed 100 people in its construction, with a full-time staff of 25. The company also estimated that supplying the plant with chips from waste wood would have given work to 150 people.

The plant was expected to require two years for planning and three years to build.

Flint said Winstanley Enterprises has invested heavily in time and effort in the North Springfield power project. Planning work has "slowed down dramatically," Flint said. "But it's not abandoned. It's been back-burnered."

Steve Costello, a spokesman for Central Vermont Public Service Corp., declined to comment on the Winstanley project, saying his company had signed confidentiality agreements and unless the Winstanley family spoke, the utility would follow suit.

But Costello did say that CVPS had decided to "focus" on four projects, including three involving renewable energy sources. Two of those three are in Vermont. He declined to identify them.

He said CVPS had originally decided to seek 40 megawatts of new generating capacity, but the four projects that the company is now entertaining represent 55 megawatts.

He predicted that Vermonters would be pleased with the company's choices. "It's a strong step forward on the renewable front. I think people will like them."

susan.smallheer@rutlandherald.com
